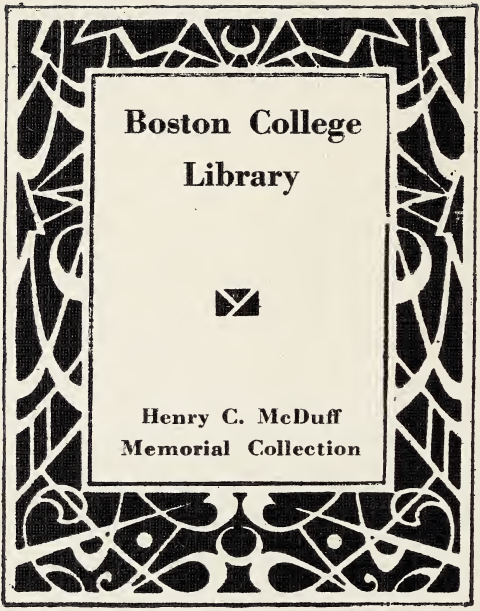
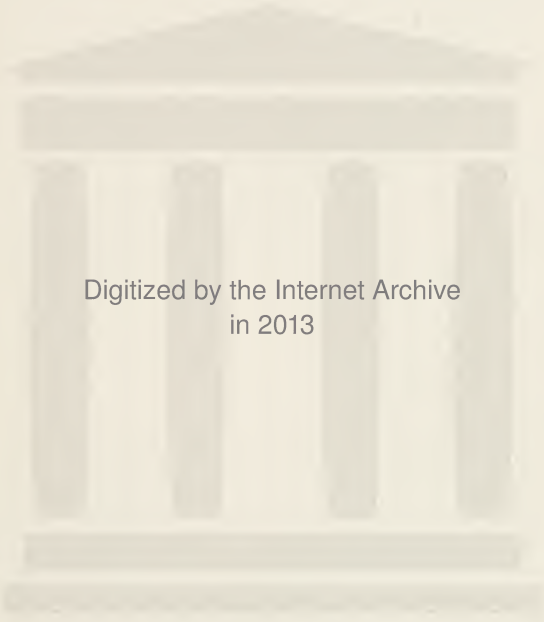
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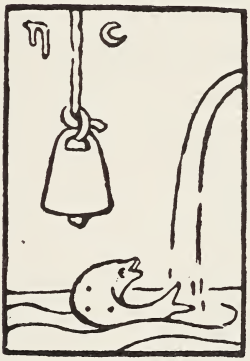
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THE
KILTARTAN POETRY BOOK

PROSE TRANSLATIONS FROM
THE IRISH

By LADY GREGORY



G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS
NEW YORK AND LONDON
The Knickerbocker Press
1919

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Introduction

I

If in my childhood I had been asked to give the name of an Irish poem, I should certainly have said "Let Erin remember the days of old," or "Rich and rare were the gems she wore"; for although among the ornamental books that lay on the round drawingroom table, the only one of Moore's was *Lalla Rookh*, some guest would now and then sing one of his melodies at the piano; and I can remember vexing or trying to vex my governess by triumphant mention of Malachi's collar of gold, she no doubt as well as I believing the "proud invader" it was torn from to have been, like herself, an English one. A little later I came to know other verses, ballads nearer to the tradition of the country than Moore's faint sentiment. For a romantic love of

country had awakened in me, perhaps through the wide beauty of my home, from whose hillsides I could see the mountain of Burren and Iar Connacht, and at sunset the silver western sea; or it maybe through the half revealed sympathy of my old nurse for the rebels whose cheering she remembered when the French landed at Killala in '98; or perhaps but through the natural breaking of a younger child of the house from the conservatism of her elders. So when we were taken sometimes as a treat the five mile drive to our market town, Loughrea, I would, on tiptoe at the counter, hold up the six pence earned by saying without a mistake my Bible lesson on the Sunday, and the old stationer, looking down through his spectacles would give me what I wanted saying that I was his best customer for Fenian books; and one of my sisters, rather doubtfully consenting to my choice of *The Spirit of the Nation* for a birthday present, qualified the gift by copying into it "Patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel."

I have some of them by me yet, the little books in gay paper or in green cloth, and some verses in them seem to me no less moving than in those early days, such as Davis's lament·

We thought you would not die, we were sure you would not go
And leave us in our utmost need to Cromwell's cruel blow;
Sheep without a shepherd when the snow shuts out the sky,
O why did you leave us Owen? Why did you die?

And if some others are little more than a catalogue, unmusical, as:—

Now to begin to name them I'll continue in a direct line,
There's John Mitchell, Thomas Francis Meagher and also William Smith O'Brien;
John Martin and O'Donoghue, Erin sorely feels their loss,
And to complete their number I will include O'Donovan Ross—

yet there is in them a certain dignity, an intensity born of continuity of purpose; they are

roughly hammered links in a chain of unequal workmanship, but stretching back through the centuries to the Munster poets of the days of Elizabeth, advised by Spenser to harry them out of Ireland. The names change from age to age, that is all. The verses of the seventeenth century hallow those of Mac Carthys and Fitzgeralds who fought for the Stuarts or "knocked obedience out of the Gall"; the eighteenth ended with the rebels of '98; the nineteenth had Emmet and Mitchell and its Manchester martyrs. Already in these early days of the twentieth the street singers cry out:

Mac Dermott, Mallin, Hanrahan, Daly, Colbert and Mac Bride
All men who for our country's cause have nobly bled and died.

Even Yeats, falling into the tradition, has put in a lyric the names of some of those who died in Easter week, and through whose death "a terrible beauty is born."

II

I am glad to remember that through the twelve years of our married life, 1880–92, my husband and his people were able to keep their liking and respect for each other. For those were the years of the land war, tenant struggling to gain a lasting possession for his children, landlord to keep that which had been given in trust to him for his; each ready in his anger to turn the heritage of the other to desolation; while the vision of some went yet farther, through breaking to the rebuilding of a nation. The passion, the imagination of Ireland were thrown into the fight. I often thought to find some poem putting such passion into fiery or memorable lines. But the first I thought worth the keeping,—I have it yet, was Katherine Tynan's lament for Parnell, written two years after his death. In tearing it from the corner of some newspaper I had unwittingly taken note of almost the moment of a new impulse in lit-

erature, in poetry. For with that death, the loss of that dominant personality, and in the quarrel that followed, came the disbanding of an army, the unloosing of forces, the setting free of the imagination of Ireland.

III

Once in my childhood I had been eager to learn Irish; I thought to get leave to take lessons from an old Scripture-reader who spent a part of his time in the parish of Killinane, teaching such scholars as he could find to read their own language in the hope that they might turn to the only book then being printed in Irish, the Bible. But my asking, timid with the fear of mockery, was unheeded. Yet I missed but by a little an opportunity that might have made me a real Irish scholar, and not as I am, imperfect, stumbling. For a kinsman learned in the language, the translator of the wonderful *Silva Gaedelica* had been sometimes a guest in the

house, and would still have been welcomed there but that my mother, who had a great dislike to the marriage of cousins had fancied he was taking a liking to one of my elder sisters; and with that suspicion the "winged nymph, Opportunity" had passed from my reach. After my marriage I bought a grammar and worked at it for a while with the help of a gardener. But it was difficult and my teacher was languid, suspecting it may be some hidden mockery, for those were the days before Irish became the fashion. It was not till a dozen or more years later, and after my husband's death, that my son, having won the classical entrance scholarship at Harrow, took a fancy to learn a nearer language, and rode over to Tillyra before breakfast one morning to ask our neighbour Edward Martyn to help him to a teacher. He came back without what he had sought, but with the gift of a fine old Irish Bible, which became a help in our early lessons. For we set to work together, and I found the task a light one in

comparison with those first attempts. For that young priest, Father Eugene O'Growney, sent from Ireland to look for health in California, had used the short space of life left to him in writing simple lessons in Irish grammar, that made at least the first steps easy. And another thing had happened. Dr. Douglas Hyde, *An Craoibhin*, had founded the Gaelic League, and through it country people were gathered together in the Irish speaking places to give the songs and poems, old and new, kept in their memory. This discovery, this disclosure of the folk learning, the folk poetry, the ancient tradition, was the small beginning of a weighty change. It was an upsetting of the table of values, an astonishing excitement. The imagination of Ireland had found a new homing place.

IV

My own imagination was aroused. I was becoming conscious of a world close to me and

that I had been ignorant of. It was not now in the corners of newspapers I looked for poetic emotion, nor even to the singers in the streets. It was among farmers and potato diggers and old men in workhouses and beggars at my own door that I found what was beyond these and yet farther beyond that drawingroom poet of my childhood in the expression of love, and grief, and the pain of parting, that are the disclosure of the individual soul.

An Aran man, repeating to me *The Grief of a Girl's Heart* in Irish told me it was with that song his mother had often sung him to sleep as a child. It was from an old woman who had known Mary Hynes and who said of her "The sun and the moon never shone upon anything so handsome" that I first heard Raftery's song of praise of her, "The pearl that was at Ballylee," a song "that has gone around the world & as far as America." It was in a stonecutter's house where I went to have a headstone made for Raftery's grave that I found a manuscript

book of his poems, written out in the clear beautiful Irish characters. It was to a working farmer's house I walked on many a moonlit evening with the manuscript that his greater knowledge helped me to understand and by his hearth that I read for the first time the *Vision of Death* and the *Lament for O'Daly*. After that I met with many old people who had in the days before the Famine seen or talked with the wandering poet who was in the succession of those who had made and recited their lyrics on the Irish roads before Chaucer wrote.

V

And so I came by the road nearest me to the old legends, the old heroic poems. It was a man of a hundred years who told me the story of Cuchulain's fight with his own son, the son of Aoife, and how the young man as he lay dying had reproached him and said "Did you not see how I threw every spear fair and easy at you,

and you threw your spear hard and wicked at me? And I did not come out to tell my name to one or to two but if I had told it to anyone in the whole world, I would soonest tell it to your pale face." Deirdre's beauty "that brought the Sons of Usnach to their death" comes into many of the country songs. Grania of the yet earlier poems is not so well thought of. An old basket-maker said scornfully "Many would tell you she slept under the cromlechs but I don't believe that, and she a king's daughter. And I don't believe she was handsome, either. If she was, why would she have run away?" And another said "Finn had more wisdom than all the men of the world, but he wasn't wise enough to put a bar on Grania." I was told in many places of Osgar's bravery and Goll's strength and Conan's bitter tongue, and the arguments of Oisin and Patrick. And I have often been given the story of Oisin's journey to Tir-nan-Og, the Country of the Young, that is, as I am told, "a fine place and every-

thing that is good is in it. And if anyone is sent there for a minute he will want to stop in it, and twenty years will seem to him like one half hour;" and "they say Tir-nan-Og is there yet, and so it may be in any place."

VI

In the ancient times the poets told of this Country of the Young, with its trees bearing fruit and blossom at the one time; its golden apples that gave lasting life; its armies "that go out in good order, ahead of their beautiful king, marching among blue spears scattering their enemies, an army with high looks, rushing, avenging;" before news had come to Ireland, of the Evangelist's vision of the Tree of Life and of the "white horse, and he that sat on him had a bow, and a crown was given to him, and he went forth conquering and to conquer." They had told of the place "where delight is common, and music" before saintly Columcille

on the night of the Sabbath of rest "reached to the troops of the archangels and the plain where music has not to be born." But in later days religion, while offering abundant pictures of an after world of punishment, "the flagstone of pain," "the cauldron that is boiling for ever," the fire the least flame of which is "bigger than fifteen hundred of turf," so that Oisin listening to St. Patrick demands a familiar weapon, an iron flail, to beat down such familiar terrors, has left Heaven itself far off, mysterious, intangible, without earthly similes or foreshadowings. I think it is perhaps because of this that the country poets of to-day and yesterday have put their dream, their vision of the Delectable Mountains, of the Land of Promise, into exaggerated praise of places dear to them. Raftery sees something beyond the barren Mayo bogs when he tells of that "fine place without fog falling, a blessed place that the sun shines on, and the wind does not rise there or anything of the sort," and where as he says in another poem

"logwood and mahogany" grow in company with its wind twisted beech and storm bent sycamore. Even my own home "sweet Coole demesne" has been transfigured in songs of the neighbourhood; and a while ago an old woman asking alms at the door while speaking of a monastery near Athenry broke into a chant of praise that has in it perhaps some memory of the Well of Healing at the world's end that helped the gods to new strength in their great battle at Moytura. "Three barrels there are with water, and to see the first barrel boiling it is certain you will get a cure. Water there does be rushing down; you to stop you could hear it talking; to go there you would get cured of anything unless it might be the stroke of the Fool."

VII

In translating these poems I have chosen to do so in the speech of the thatched houses where I have heard and gathered them. *An Craoibhin*

had already used this Gaelic construction, these Elizabethan phrases, in translating the *Love Songs of Connacht*, as I have used it even in my creative work. Synge had not yet used it when he found in my *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* "the dialect he had been trying to master," and of which he afterwards made such splendid use. Most of the translations in this book have already been printed in *Cuchulain of Muirthemne*, *Gods and Fighting Men*, *Saints and Wonders*, and *Poets and Dreamers*. When in the first month of the new year I began to choose from among them, it seemed strange to me that the laments so far outnumbered any songs of joy. But before that month was out news was brought to me that made the keening of women for the brave and of those who are left lonely after the young seem to be but the natural outcome and expression of human life.

AUGUSTA GREGORY.

COOLE, May, 1918.

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THE KILTARTAN POETRY BOOK

The Grief of a Girl's Heart

O DONALL og, if you go across the sea, bring myself with you and do not forget it; and you will have a sweetheart for fair days and market days, and the daughter of the King of Greece beside you at night. It is late last night the dog was speaking of you; the snipe was speaking of you in her deep marsh. It is you are the lonely bird through the woods; and that you may be without a mate until you find me.

You promised me, and you said a lie to me, that you would be before me where the sheep are flocked; I gave a whistle and three hundred cries to you, and I found nothing there but a bleating lamb.

You promised me a thing that was hard for

you, a ship of gold under a silver mast; twelve towns with a market in all of them, and a fine white court by the side of the sea.

You promised me a thing that is not possible, that you would give me gloves of the skin of a fish; that you would give me shoes of the skin of a bird, and a suit of the dearest silk in Ireland.

O Donall og, it is I would be better to you than a high, proud, spendthrift lady: I would milk the cow; I would bring help to you; and if you were hard pressed, I would strike a blow for you.

O, ochone, and it's not with hunger or with wanting food, or drink, or sleep, that I am growing thin, and my life is shortened; but it is the love of a young man has withered me away.

It is early in the morning that I saw him coming, going along the road on the back of a horse; he did not come to me; he made nothing of me; and it is on my way home that I cried my fill.

When I go by myself to the Well of Loneliness,

I sit down and I go through my trouble; when I see the world and do not see my boy, he that has an amber shade in his hair.

It was on that Sunday I gave my love to you; the Sunday that is last before Easter Sunday. And myself on my knees reading the Passion; and my two eyes giving love to you for ever.

O, aya! my mother, give myself to him; and give him all that you have in the world; get out yourself to ask for alms, and do not come back and forward looking for me.

My mother said to me not to be talking with you to-day, or to-morrow, or on the Sunday; it was a bad time she took for telling me that; it was shutting the door after the house was robbed.

My heart is as black as the blackness of the sloe, or as the black coal that is on the smith's forge; or as the sole of a shoe left in white halls; it was you put that darkness over my life.

You have taken the east from me; you have taken the west from me; you have taken what

is before me and what is behind me; you have taken the moon, you have taken the sun from me; and my fear is great that you have taken God from me!

A Lament for Fair-Haired Donough that was Hanged in Galway

IT was bound fast here you saw him, and wondered to see him,
Our fair-haired Donough, and he after being condemned;
There was a little white cap on him in place of a hat,
And a hempen rope in the place of a neck-cloth.

I am after walking here all through the night,
Like a young lamb in a great flock of sheep;
My breast open, my hair loosened out,
And how did I find my brother but stretched before me!

The first place I cried my fill was at the top of the lake;
The second place was at the foot of the gallows;
The third place was at the head of your dead body
Among the Gall, and my own head as if cut in two.

If you were with me in the place you had a right to be,
Down in Sligo or down in Ballinrobe,
It is the gallows would be broken, it is the rope would be cut
And fair-haired Donough going home by the path.

O fair-haired Donough, it is not the gallows was fit for you;
But to be going to the barn, to be threshing out the straw;

To be turning the plough to the right hand and
to the left,
To be putting the red side of the soil upper-
most.

O fair-haired Donough, O dear brother,
It is well I know who it was took you away from
me;
Drinking from the cup, putting a light to the
pipe,
And walking in the dew in the cover of the night.

O Michael Malley, O scourge of misfortune!
My brother was no calf of a vagabond cow;
But a well-shaped boy on a height or a hillside,
To knock a low pleasant sound out of a hurling-
stick.

And fair-haired Donough, is not that the pity,
You that would carry well a spur or a boot;
I would put clothes in the fashion on you from
cloth that would be lasting;
I would send you out like a gentleman's son.

O Michael Malley, may your sons never be in
one another's company;
May your daughters never ask a marriage por-
tion of you;
The two ends of the table are empty, the house
is filled,
And fair-haired Donough, my brother, is
stretched out.

There is a marriage portion coming home for
Donough,
But it is not cattle or sheep or horses;
But tobacco and pipes and white candles,
And it will not be begrudged to them that will
use it.

Raftery's Praise of Mary Hynes

GOING to Mass by the will of God, the day came wet and the wind rose; I met Mary Hynes at the cross of Kiltartan, and I fell in love with her there and then.

I spoke to her kind and mannerly, as by report was her own way; and she said "Raftery my mind is easy; you may come to-day to Ballylee."

When I heard her offer I did not linger; when her talk went to my heart my heart rose. We had only to go across the three fields; we had daylight with us to Ballylee.

The table was laid with glasses and a quart measure; she had fair hair and she sitting beside me; and she said, "Drink, Raftery, and a hundred welcomes; there is a strong cellar in Ballylee."

O star of light and O sun in harvest; O amber hair, O my share of the world! Will you come with me on the Sunday, till we agree together before all the people?

I would not begrudge you a song every Sunday evening; punch on the table or wine if you would drink it. But O King of Glory, dry the roads before me till I find the way to Ballylee.

There is sweet air on the side of the hill, when you are looking down upon Ballylee; when you are walking in the valley picking nuts and blackberries, there is music of the birds in it and music of the Sidhe.

What is the worth of greatness till you have the light of the flower of the branch that is by your side? There is no good to deny it or to try and hide it; she is the sun in the heavens who wounded my heart.

There was no part in Ireland I did not travel, from the rivers to the tops of the mountains; to the edge of Lough Greine whose mouth is hidden, and I saw no beauty but was behind hers.

Her hair was shining and her brows were shining too; her face was like herself, her mouth pleasant and sweet; She is the pride and I give her the branch; she is the shining flower of Ballylee.

It is Mary Hynes, the calm and easy woman, has beauty in her mind and in her face. If a hundred clerks were gathered together, they could not write down a half of her ways.

His Lament for O'Daly

IT was Thomas O'Daly that roused up young people and scattered them, and since death played on him, may God give him grace. The country is all sorrowful, always talking, since their man of sport died that would win the goal in all parts with his music. The swans on the water are nine times blacker than a blackberry since the man died from us that had pleasantness on the top of his fingers. His two grey eyes were like the dew of the morning that lies on the grass. And since he was laid in the grave, the cold is getting the upper hand.

If you travel the five provinces, you would not find his equal for countenance or behaviour, for his equal never walked on land or grass. High King of Nature, you who have all powers

in yourself, he that wasn't narrow-hearted, give him shelter in heaven for it!

He was the beautiful branch. In every quarter that he ever knew he would scatter his fill and not gather. He would spend the estate of the Dalys, their beer and their wine. And that he may be sitting in the chair of grace, in the middle of Paradise!

A sorrowful story on death, it's he is the ugly chief that did treachery, that didn't give him credit, O strong God, for a little time.

There are young women, and not without reason, sorry and heart-broken and withered, since he was left at the church. Their hair thrown down and hanging, turned grey on their head.

No flower in any garden, and the leaves of the trees have leave to cry, and they falling on the ground. There is no green flower on the tops of the tufts, since there did a boarded coffin go on Daly.

There is sorrow on the men of mirth, a cloud-

ing over the day, and no trout swim in the river. Orpheus on the harp, he lifted up everyone out of their habits; and he that stole what Argus was watching the time he took away Io; Apollo, as we read, gave them teaching, and Daly was better than all these musicians.

A hundred wouldn't be able to put together his actions and his deeds and his many good works. And Raftery says this much for Daly, because he liked him.

His Praise of the Little Hill and the Plains of Mayo

AFTER the Christmas, with the help of Christ, I will never stop if I am alive; I will go to the sharp-edged little hill; for it is a fine place without fog falling; a blessed place that the sun shines on, and the wind doesn't rise there or anything of the sort.

And if you were a year there you would get no rest, only sitting up at night and forever drinking.

The lamb and the sheep are there; the cow and the calf are there, fine lands are there without heath and without bog. Ploughing & seed-sowing in the right month, plough and harrow prepared and ready; the rent that is called for

there, they have means to pay it. There is oats and flax & large eared barley. There are beautiful valleys with good growth in them and hay. Rods grow there, and bushes and tufts, white fields are there and respect for trees; shade and shelter from wind and rain; priests and friars reading their book; spending and getting is there, and nothing scarce.

I leave it in my will that my heart rises as the wind rises, and as the fog scatters, when I think upon Carra and the two towns below it, on the two-mile bush and on the plains of Mayo. And if I were standing in the middle of my people, age would go from me and I would be young again.

His Lament for O'Kelly

THERE'S no dew or grass on Cluan Leathan. The cuckoo is not to be seen on the furze; the leaves are withering and the trees complaining of the cold. There is no sun or moon in the air or in the sky, or no light in the stars coming down, with the stretching of O'Kelly in the grave.

My grief to tell it! he to be laid low; the man that did not bring grief or trouble on any heart, that would give help to those that were down.

No light on the day like there was; the fruits not growing; no children on the breast; there's no return in the grain; the plants don't blossom as they used since O'Kelly with the fair hair went away; he that used to forgive us a great share of the rent. Since the children of Usnach

and Deirdre went to the grave, and Cuchulain, who as the stories tell us, would gain victory in every step he would take; since he died, such a story never came of sorrow or defeat; since the Gael were sold at Aughrim, and since Owen Roe died, the Branch.

His Vision of Death

I HAD a vision in my sleep last night between sleeping and waking. A figure standing beside me, thin, miserable, sad and sorrowful; the shadow of night upon his face, the tracks of the tears down his cheeks. His ribs were bending like the bottom of a riddle; his nose thin that it would go through a cambric needle; his shoulders hard and sharp that they would cut tobacco; his head dark and bushy like the top of a hill; and there is nothing I can liken his fingers to. His poor bones without any kind of covering; a withered rod in his hand, and he looking in my face. . . .

Death is a robber who heaps together kings, high princes and country lords; he brings with him the great, the young, and the wise, gripping

them by the throat before all the people. Look at him who was yesterday swift & strong, who would leap stone wall, ditch and gap. Who was in the evening walking the street, and is going under the clay on the morrow.

It is a pity for him that is tempted with the temptations of the world; and the store that will go with him is so weak, and his lease of life no better if he were to live for a thousand years than just as if he had slipped over on a visit and back again.

When you are going to lie down don't be dumb. Bare your knee and bruise the ground. Think of all the deeds that you put by you, and that you are travelling towards the meadow of the dead.

His Repentance

O KING who art in Heaven, I scream to Thee again and aloud, for it is Thy grace I am hoping for.

I am in age and my shape is withered; many a day I have been going astray. When I was young my deeds were evil; I delighted greatly in quarrels and rows. I liked much better to be playing or drinking on a Sunday morning than to be going to Mass. I was given to great oaths, and I did not let lust or drunkenness pass me by.

The day has stolen away and I have not raised the hedge, until the crop in which Thou didst take delight is destroyed. I am a worthless stake in the corner of a hedge, or I am like a boat that has lost its rudder, that would be broken against a rock in the sea, and that would be drowned in the cold waves.

His Answer when Some Stranger Asked who He was

I AM Raftery the poet, full of hope and love; my eyes without light, my gentleness without misery. Going west on my journey with the light of my heart; weak and tired to the end of my road.

I am now, and my back to a wall, playing music to empty pockets.

A Blessing on Patrick Sarsfield

O PATRICK SARSFIELD, health be to you, since you went to France and your camps were loosened; making your sighs along with the king, and you left poor Ireland and the Gael defeated— Och ochone! O Patrick Sarsfield, it is a man with God you are; and blessed is the earth you ever walked on. The blessing of the bright sun and the moon upon you, since you took the day from the hands of King William— Och ochone!

O Patrick Sarsfield, the prayer of every person with you; my own prayer and the prayer of the Son of Mary with you, since you took the narrow ford going through Biorra, and since at Cuilenn O'Cuanac you won Limerick— Och ochone!

I will go up on the mountain alone; and I will come hither from it again. It is there I saw the camp of the Gael, the poor troop thinned, not keeping with one another— Och ochone!

My five hundred healths to you, halls of Limerick, and to the beautiful troop was in our company; it is bonefires we used to have and playing-cards, and the word of God was often with us —Och ochone!

There were many soldiers glad and happy, that were going the way through seven weeks; but now they are stretched down in Aughrim— Och ochone!

They put the first breaking on us at the bridge of the Boyne; the second breaking on the bridge of Slaine; the third breaking in Aughrim of O'Kelly; and O sweet Ireland, my five hundred healths to you— Och ochone!

O'Kelly has manuring for his land, that is not sand or dung, but ready soldiers doing bravery with pikes, that were left in Aughrim stretched in ridges— Och ochone!

Who is that beyond on the hill, Ben Edair? I a poor soldier with King James. I was last year in arms and in dress, but this year I am asking alms—Och ochone!

An Aran Maid's Wedding

I AM widow and maid, and I very young; did you hear my great grief, that my treasure was drowned? If I had been in the boat that day, and my hand on the rope, my word to you, O'Reilly, it is I would have saved you sorrow.

Do you remember the day the street was full of riders, and of priests and brothers, and all talking of the wedding feast? The fiddle was there in the middle, and the harp answering to it; and twelve mannerly women to bring my love to his bed.

But you were of those three that went across to Kilcomin, ferrying Father Peter, who was three-and-eighty years old; if you came back within a month itself, I would be well content;

but is it not a pity I to be lonely, and my first love in the waves?

I would not begrudge you, O'Reilly, to be kinsman to a king; white bright courts around you, and you lying at your ease; a quiet, well-learned lady to be settling out your pillow; but it is a great thing you to die from me when I had given you my love entirely.

It is no wonder a broken heart to be with your father and your mother; the white-breasted mother that crooned you, and you a baby; your wedded wife, O thousand treasures, that never set out your bed; and the day you went to Trabawn, how well it failed you to come home.

Your eyes are with the eels, and your lips with the crabs; and your two white hands under the sharp rule of the salmon. Five pounds I would give to him that would find my true love. Ochone! it is you are a sharp grief to young Mary ni-Curtain!

A Poem Written in Time of Trouble by an Irish Priest who Had Taken Orders in France

MY thoughts, my grief! are without strength
My spirit is journeying towards death
My eyes are as a frozen sea
My tears my daily food;
There is nothing in life but only misery.
My poor heart is torn
And my thoughts are sharp wounds within me,
Mourning the miserable state of Ireland.

Misfortune has come upon us all together
The poor, the rich, the weak and the strong

The great lord by whom hundreds were maintained
The powerful strong man, and the man that holds the plough;
And the cross laid on the bare shoulder of every man.

Our feasts are without any voice of priests
And none at them but women lamenting
Tearing their hair with troubled minds
Keening miserably after the Fenians.

The pipes of our organs are broken
Our harps have lost their strings that were tuned
That might have made the great lamentations of Ireland.
Until the strong men come back across the sea
There is no help for us but bitter crying,
Screams, and beating of hands, and calling out.

I do not know of anything under the sky
That is friendly or favourable to the Gael

But only the sea that our need brings us to,
Or the wind that blows to the harbour
The ship that is bearing us away from Ireland;
And there is reason that these are reconciled
with us,
For we increase the sea with our tears
And the wandering wind with our sighs.

The Heart of the Wood

MY hope and my love, we will go for a while into the wood, scattering the dew, where we will see the trout, we will see the blackbird on its nest; the deer and the buck calling, the little bird that is sweetest singing on the branches; the cuckoo on the top of the fresh green; and death will never come near us for ever in the sweet wood.

An Craoibhin Complains Because He is a Poet

IT'S my grief that I am not a little white duck,
And I'd swim over the sea to France or to Spain;
I would not stay in Ireland for one week only,
To be without eating, without drinking, without a full jug.

Without a full jug, without eating, without drinking,
Without a feast to get, without wine, without meat,
Without high dances, without a big name, without music;
There is hunger on me, and I astray this long time.

It's my grief that I am not an old crow;
I would sit for awhile up on the old branch;
I could satisfy my hunger, and I not as I am
With a grain of oats or a white potato.

It's my grief that I am not a red fox,
Leaping strong and swift on the mountains,
Eating cocks and hens without pity,
Taking ducks and geese as a conquerer.

It's my grief that I am not a bright salmon,
Going through the strong full water,
Catching the mayflies by my craft,
Swimming at my choice, and swimming with
the stream.

It's my grief that I am of the race of the poets;
It would be better for me to be a high rock,
Or a stone or a tree or an herb or a flower
Or anything at all but the thing that I am!

He Cries Out Against Love

THERE are three fine devils eating my heart—
They left me, my grief! without a thing;
Sickness wrought, and Love wrought,
And an empty pocket, my ruin and my woe.
Poverty left me without a shirt,
Barefooted, barelegged, without any covering;
Sickness left me with my head weak
And my body miserable, an ugly thing.
Love left me like a coal upon the floor,
Like a half-burned sod that is never put out.
Worse than the cough, worse than the fever itself,
Worse than any curse at all under the sun,
Worse than the great poverty
Is the devil that is called "Love" by the people.
And if I were in my young youth again
I would not take, or give, or ask for a kiss!

He Meditates on the Life of a Rich Man

A GOLDEN cradle under you, and you young;
A right mother and a strong kiss.

A lively horse, and you a boy;
A school and learning and close companions.

A beautiful wife, and you a man;
A wide house and everything that is good.

A fine wife, children, substance;
Cattle, means, herds and flocks.

A place to sit, a place to lie down;
Plenty of food and plenty of drink.

After that, an old man among old men;
Respect on you and honour on you.

Head of the court, of the jury, of the meeting,
And the counsellors not the worse for having
you.

At the end of your days death, and then
Hiding away; the boards and the church.

What are you better after to-night
Than Ned the beggar or Seaghan the fool?

Forgaill's Praise of Columcille

THIS now is the poem of praise and of lamentation that was made for Columcille, Speckled Salmon of the Boyne, High Saint of the Gael, by Forgaill that was afterwards called Blind Forgaill, Chief Poet of Ireland:

It is not a little story this is; it is not a story about a fool it is; it is not one district that is keening but every district, with a great sound that is not to be borne, hearing the story of Columcille, without life, without a church.

It is not the trouble of one house, or the grief of one harp-string; all the plains are heavy, hearing the word that is a wound.

What way will a simple man tell of him? Even Nera from the Sidhe could not do it; he is

not made much of now; our learned one is not the light of our life, now he is hidden away from us.

He that used to keep us living is dead; he that was our rightful head has died from us; he has died from us that was God's messenger.

The knowledgeable man that used to put fear from us is not here; the teller of words does not return to us; the teacher is gone from us that taught silence to the people.

The whole world was his; it is a harp without its strings; it is a church without its abbot.

Colum rose very high the time God's companies rose to meet him; it is bright the angels were, attending on him.

It is short his life was, it is little used to satisfy him; when the wind blew the sheet against him on the sand, the shape of his ribs could be seen through it. He was the head of every gathering; he was a dun of the book of the law; he put a flame in the district of the north, he lightened the district of the west; the

east was his along with it; he did not open his heart to every company. Good his death; he went with God's angels that came to meet him.

He has reached to Axal of his help and to the troops of the archangels; he has reached to a place where night is not seen; he has reached to a plain where music has not to be born; where no one listens to oppression. The King of priests has done away with his troubles.

He knew the way he was going; he gave kindness for hatred; he learned psalms; he broke the battle against hunger.

He knew seasons and storms; he read the secrets of the great wisdom; he knew the course of the moon; he took notice of its race with the branching sun. He was skilful in the course of the sea; to tell every high thing we have heard from Colum, would be to count the stars of heaven.

A healer of the heart of the wise; a full satisfier of guests; our crowned one who spoke with Axal; a shelter to the naked; a comforter to the

poor; he was eager, he was noble, it is high his death was. We hope great honour will be given to him on the head of these deeds.

And when Forgaill had made that lament he said, "It is a great shaping and a great finish I have given to these words, and I cannot make a praise beyond this, for my eyes have been taken from me."

It was Aodh, King of Ireland gave seven cumhals for his name to be given in the praising of Columcille; and Aodh laid it down to Forgaill that this song should be above every other song.

But it was after death the reward and the praise were given to blind Forgaill for it was Heaven that was given to him as the price of the praising of the King.

The Deer's Cry

BLESSED Patrick made this hymn one time he was going to preach the Faith at Teamhuir, and his enemies lay in hiding to make an attack on him as he passed. But all they could see passing as he himself and Benen his servant went by, was a wild deer and a fawn. And the Deer's Cry is the name of the hymn to this day.

I bind myself to-day to a strong strength, to a calling on the Trinity. I believe in a Threeness with confession of a Oneness in the Creator of the World.

I bind myself to-day to the strength of Christ's birth and His baptism; to the strength of His crucifixion with His burial; to the strength of His resurrection with His ascension;

In stability of earth, in steadfastness of rock, I bind to myself to-day God's strength to pilot me;

God's power to uphold me; God's wisdom to guide me; God's eye to look before me; God's ear to hear me;

God's word to speak for me; God's hand to guard me; God's path to lie before me; God's shield to protect me; God's host to save me;

Against snares of demons; against the begging of sins; against the asking of nature; against all my ill-wishers near me and far from me; alone and in a crowd.

So I have called on all these strengths to come between me and every fierce and merciless strength that may come between my body and my soul;

Against incantations of false prophets; against black laws of heathens; against false laws of heretics; against craft of idolatry; against spells of women & smiths and druids; against every knowledge forbidden to the souls of men.

Christ for my protection to-day against poison, against burning, against drowning, against wounding; that a multitude of rewards may come to me. Christ with me, Christ before me; Christ behind me, Christ in me; Christ under me, Christ over me; Christ to the right of me, Christ to the left of me; Christ in lying down, Christ in sitting, Christ in rising up;

Christ in the heart of everyone that thinks of me; Christ in the mouth of everyone that speaks to me; Christ in every eye that sees me; Christ in every ear that hears me.

I bind to myself to-day a strong strength to a calling upon the Trinity; I believe in a Threeness with confession of a Oneness in the Creator of the World.

The Hymn of Molling's Guest, The Man full of Trouble

HE is clean gold, he is Heaven about the sun, he is a silver vessel having wine in it; he is an angel, he is the wisdom of saints; everyone that is doing the will of the King.

He is a bird with a trap closing about him; he is a broken ship in great danger; he is an empty vessel, he is a withered tree; he that is not doing the will of the King.

He is a sweet-smelling branch with its blossoms; he is a vessel that is full of honey; he is a shining stone of good luck; he who does the will of the Son of God of Heaven.

He is a blind nut without profit; he is ill-

smelling rottenness, he is a withered tree; he is a wild apple branch without blossom; he that is not doing the will of the King.

If he does the will of the Son of God of Heaven, he is a bright sun with summer about it; he is the image of the God of Heaven; he is a vessel of clear glass.

He is a racehorse over a smooth plain, the man that is striving for the kingdom of the great God; he is a chariot that is seen under a king, that wins the victory with golden bridles.

He is a sun that warms high heaven; the king to whom the great King is thankful; he is a church, joyful, noble; he is a shrine having gold about it.

He is an altar having wine poured upon it; having many quires singing around; he is a clean chalice with ale in it; he is bronze, white, shining, he is gold.

The Hag of Beare

IT is of Corca Dubhne she was, and she had her youth seven times over, and every man that had lived with her died of old age, and her grandsons and great-grandsons were tribes and races. And through a hundred years she wore upon her head the veil Cuimire had blessed. Then age and weakness came upon her and it is what she said:

Ebb-tide to me as to the sea; old age brings me reproach; I used to wear a shift that was always new; to-day, I have not even a cast one.

It is riches you are loving, it is not men; it was men we loved in the time we were living.

There were dear men on whose plains we used

to be driving; it is good the time we passed with them; it is little we were broken afterwards.

When my arms are seen it is long and thin they are; once they used to be fondling, they used to be around great kings.

The young girls give a welcome to Beltaine when it comes to them; sorrow is more fitting for me; an old pitiful hag.

I have no pleasant talk; no sheep are killed for my wedding; it is little but my hair is grey; it is many colours I had over it when I used to be drinking good ale.

I have no envy against the old, but only against women; I myself am spent with old age, while women's heads are still yellow.

The stone of the kings on Feman; the chair of Ronan in Bregia; it is long since storms have wrecked them, they are old mouldering grave-stones.

The wave of the great sea is speaking; the winter is striking us with it; I do not look to welcome to-day Fermuid son of Mugh.

I know what they are doing; they are rowing through the reeds of the ford of Alma; it is cold is the place where they sleep.

The summer of youth where we were has been spent along with its harvest; winter age that drowns everyone, its beginning has come upon me.

It is beautiful was my green cloak, my king liked to see it on me; it is noble was the man that stirred it, he put wool on it when it was bare.

Amen, great is the pity; every acorn has to drop. After feasting with shining candles, to be in the darkness of a prayer-house.

I was once living with kings, drinking mead and wine; to-day I am drinking whey-water among withered old women.

There are three floods that come up to the dun of Ard-Ruide: a flood of fighting-men, a flood of horses, a flood of the hounds of Lugaidh's son.

The flood-wave and the two swift ebb-tides;

what the flood-wave brings you in, the ebb-wave sweeps out of your hand.

The flood-wave and the second ebb-tide; they have all come as far as me, the way that I know them well.

The flood-tide will not reach to the silence of my kitchen; though many are my company in the darkness, a hand has been laid upon them all.

My flood-tide! It is well I have kept my knowledge. It is Jesus Son of Mary keeps me happy at the ebb-tide.

It is far is the island of the great sea where the flood reaches after the ebb: I do not look for floods to reach to me after the ebb-tide.

There is hardly a little place I can know again when I see it; what used to be on the flood-tide is all on the ebb to-day!

Some of the Wonders told at the Great Gathering in the East of the World by the Voice of Philip the Apostle, that was like the Laughter of an Army, and with that no louder than the Talk of Friend in the Ear of Friend;

I. The Seven Heavens

AS to the Seven Heavens that are around the earth, the first of them is the bright cloudy heaven that is the nearest and that has shining out of it the moon and the scattering of stars. Beyond that are two flaming heavens, angels are in them and the breaking loose of winds. Beyond those an ice-cold heaven, bluer than any blue, seven times colder

than any snow, and it is out of that comes the shining of the sun. Two heavens there are above that again, bright like flame, and it is out of them shine the fiery stars that put fruitfulness in the clouds and in the sea. A high heaven, high and fiery, there is above all the rest; highest of all it is, having within it the rolling of the skies, and the labour of music, and quires of angels. In the belts, now, of the seven heavens are hidden the twelve shaking beasts that have fiery heads upon their heavenly bodies and that are blowing twelve winds about the world.

In the same belts are sleeping the dragons with fiery breath, tower-headed, blemished, that give out the crash of the thunders and blow lightnings out of their eyes.

II. The Journey of the Sun

God made on the fourth day the two and seventy kinds of the wandering stars of heaven, and the fiery course of the sun that warms the world with the sense and the splendour of angels.

Twelve plains there are under the body of the earth he lightens every night; the fiery sea laughs against his journey; ranks of angels come together, welcoming his visit after the brightness of the night. The first place he brightens is the stream beyond the seas, with news of the eastern waters. Then he lightens the ocean of fire and the seas of sulphur-fire that are round about the red countries.

Then he shines upon the troops of boys in the pleasant fields, who send out their cry to heaven through dread of the beast that kills thousands of armies under the waves of the south. Then he shines upon the mountains that have streams of fire, on the hosts that protect them in the plains. Then the ribs of the great beast shine, and the four and twenty champions rise up in the valley of pain. He shines over against the terrible many-thronged fence in the north that has closed around the people of hell. He shines on the dark valleys having sorrowful streams over their faces. He brightens the ribs of the

beast that sends out the many seas around the earth; that sucks in again the many seas till the sands on every side are dry. He shines upon the many beasts that sleep their sleep of tears in the valley of flowers from the first beginning of the world; and on the sorrowful tearful plain, with the dragons that were set under the mist. He shines then upon the bird-flocks singing their many tunes in the flower-valleys; upon the shining plains with the wine-flowers that lighten the valley; he shines at the last against Adam's Paradise till he rises up in the morning from the east. There would be many stories now for the sun to tell upon his journey, if he had but a tongue to give them out.

III. The Nature of the Stars

The stars now differ in their nature from one another. As to the ten stars of Gaburn, trembling takes hold of them, and fiery manes are put over their faces, to foretell a plague or a death of the people. Other stars there are that bring

great heat or great cold or great mists upon the earth, others there are that run to encourage the dragons that blow lightnings on the world; others of them run to the end of fifty years and then ask their time for sleeping. To the end of seven years they sleep till they awake at the shout of the blessed angels, and the voices of the dragons of the valley. Other runs through the six days and the six nights till the coming of the Sunday; at its beginning they begin their many kinds of music, and they fall asleep again till the coming again from heaven of God's Sunday, and with that they follow the same round.

The Call to Bran

ONE time Bran, son of Febal, was out by himself near his dun, and he heard music behind him. And it kept always after him, and at last he fell asleep with the sweetness of the sound. And when he awoke from his sleep he saw beside him a branch of silver, and it having white blossoms, and the whiteness of the silver was the same as the whiteness of the blossoms. And he brought the branch in his hand into the royal house, and when all his people were with him they saw a woman with strange clothing standing in the house. And she began to make a song for Bran, and all the people were looking at her and listening to her, and it is what she said: I bring a branch of the apple-tree from Emhain, from the

far island around which are the shining horses of the Son of Lir. A delight of the eyes is the plain where the hosts hold their games: curragh racing against chariot in the Silver-White Plain to the south.

There are feet of white bronze under it, shining through life and time; a comely level land through the length of the world's age, and many blossoms falling on it.

There is an old tree there with blossoms, and birds calling from among them; every colour is shining there. Delight is common, and music in the Gentle Voiced Plain, in the Silver Cloud Plain to the south. There is nothing hard or rough, but sweet music striking on the ear; keening is not used, or treachery, in the tilled familiar land.

To be without grief, without sorrow, without death, without any sickness, without weakness; that is the sign of Emhain; it is not a common wonder that is.

There is nothing to liken its mists to, the sea

washes the wave against the land; brightness falls from its hair.

Golden chariots in the Plain of the Sea, rising up to the sun with the tide; silver chariots and bronze chariots on the Plain of Sports.

It is a day of lasting weather, silver is dropping on the land; a pure white cliff on the edge of the sea, getting its warmth from the sun.

The host race over the Plain of Sports; it is beautiful and not weak their game is; death or the ebbing of the tide will not come to them in the Many-coloured Land.

There will come at sunrise a fair man, lighting up the level lands; he rides upon the plain that is beaten by the waves, he stirs the sea till it is like blood. An army will come over the clear sea, rowing to the stone that is in sight, that has a hundred sounds of music.

It sings a song to the army; it is not sad through the length of time; it increases music with hundreds singing together; they do not look for death or the ebb-tide.

The Army of the Sidhe

LAEGAIRE, son of the king of Connacht, was out one day with the king his father near Loch na-n Ean, the Lake of Birds, and the men of Connacht with them, and they saw a man coming to them through the mist. Long golden-yellow hair he had, and at his belt a gold-hilted sword, and in his hand two five-barbed darts; a gold-rimmed shield on his back, a five-folded crimson cloak about his shoulders, and it is what he said:

The most beautiful of plains is the Plain of the Two Mists; it is not far from this; the men of its army in good order go out ahead of their beautiful king; they march among blue spears, white troops of fighters with curled hair.

They scatter the troops of their enemies, they

destroy every country they make an attack on; they are beautiful in battle, a host with high looks, rushing, avenging.

It is no wonder they to have such strength every one of them is the son of a king and a queen; manes of hair they have of the colour of gold.

Their bodies smooth and comely; their eyes blue and far-seeing; their teeth bright like crystal within their thin red lips.

White shields they have in their hands, with patterns on them of white silver; blue shining swords, red horns set with gold. They are good at killing men in battle; good at song-making, good at chess-playing.

The most beautiful of plains is the Plain of the Two Mists; it is not far from this place.

Credhe's Complaint at the Battle of the White Strand

AND Credhe came to where her man was, and she keened him and cried over him, and she made this complaint:

The Harbour roars, O the harbour roars over the rushing race of the Headland of the Two Storms, the drowning of the hero of the Lake of the Two Dogs, that is what the waves are keening on the strand.

Sweet-voiced is the crane, O sweet-voiced is the crane in the marshes of the Ridge of the Two Strong Men; it is she cannot save her nestlings, the wild dog of two colours is taking her little ones.

Pitiful the cry, pitiful the cry the thrush is

making in the Pleasant Ridge; sorrowful is the cry of the blackbird in Leiter Laeig.

Sorrowful the call, O sorrowful the call of the deer in the Ridge of Two Lights; the doe is lying dead in Druim Silenn, the mighty stag cries after her.

Sorrowful to me, O sorrowful to me the death of the hero that lay beside me; the son of the woman of the Wood of the Two Thickets, to be with a bunch of grass under his head.

Sore to me, O sore to me Cael to be a dead man beside me, the waves to have gone over his white body; it is his pleasantness that has put my wits astray.

A woeful shout, O a woeful shout the waves are making on the strand; they that took hold of comely Cael, a pity it is he went to meet them.

A woeful crash, O a woeful crash the waves are making on the strand to the north, breaking against the smooth rock, crying after Cael now he is gone.

A sorrowful fight, O a sorrowful fight, the sea

is making with the strand to the north; my beauty is lessened; the end of my life is measured.

A song of grief, O a song of grief is made by the waves of Tulcha Leis; all I had is gone since this story came to me. Since the son of Crimthann is drowned I will love no one after him for ever; many a king fell by his hand; his shield never cried out in the battle.

After she had made that complaint Credhe laid herself down beside Cael and died for grief after him. And they were put in the one grave, and it was Caoilte raised the stone over them.

A Sleepy Song that Grania used to be singing over Diarmuid the Time they were wandering and hiding from Finn

SLEEP a little, a little little, for there is nothing at all to fear, Diarmuid grandson of Duibhne; sleep here soundly, Diarmuid to whom I have given my love. It is I will keep watch for you, grandchild of shapely Duibhne; sleep a little, a blessing on you, beside the well of the strong field; my lamb from above the lake, from the banks of the strong streams.

Let your sleep be like the sleep in the North of fair comely Fionnchadh of Ess Ruadh, the time he took Slaine with bravery as we think, in spite of Failbhe of the Hard Head.

Let your sleep be like the sleep in the West of Aine daughter of Galian, the time she went on a journey in the night with Dubhthach from Dorinis, by the light of torches.

Let your sleep be like the sleep in the East of Deaghadh the proud, the brave fighter, the time he took Coincheann, daughter of Binn, in spite of fierce Decheall of Duibhreann.

O heart of the valour of the world to the west of Greece, my heart will go near to breaking if I do not see you every day. The parting of us two will be the parting of two children of the one house; it will be the parting of life from the body, Diarmuid.

Her Song to Rouse Him from Sleep

THE stag to the east is not asleep, he does not stop from bellowing; though he is in the woods of the blackbirds, sleep is not in his mind; the hornless doe is not asleep, crying after her speckled fawn; she is going over the bushes, she does not sleep in her home.

The cuckoo is not asleep, the thrush is not asleep, the tops of the trees are a noisy place; the duck is not asleep, she is made ready for good swimming; the bog-lark is not asleep to-night on the high stormy bogs; the sound of her clear voice is sweet; she is not sleeping between the streams.

Her Lament for His Death

THEN when Grania was certain of Diarmuid's death she gave out a long very pitiful cry that was heard through the whole place, and her women and her people came to her, and asked what ailed her to give a cry like that. And she told them how Diarmuid had come to his death by the Boar of Beinn Gulbain in the hunt Finn had made. When her people heard that, they gave three great heavy cries in the same way, that were heard in the clouds and the waste places of the sky. And then Grania bade the five hundred that she had for household to go to Beinn Gulbain for the body of Diarmuid, and when they were bringing it back, she went out to meet them, and they put down the body of Diarmuid, and it is what

she said: I am your wife, beautiful Diarmuid, the man I would do no hurt to; it is sorrowful I am after you to-night.

I am looking at the hawk and the hound my secret love used to be hunting with; she that loved the three, let her be put in the grave with Diarmuid.

Let us be glad to-night, let us make all welcome to-night, let us be open-handed to-night, since we are sitting by the body of a king.

And O Diarmuid, she said, it is a hard bed Finn has given you, to be lying on the stones and to be wet with the rain. Ochone! she said, your blue eyes to be without sight, you that were friendly and generous and pursuing. O love! O Diarmuid! it is a pity it is he sent you to your death.

You were a champion of the men of Ireland, their prop in the middle of the fight; you were the head of every battle; your ways were glad and pleasant.

It is sorrowful I am, without mirth, without

light, but only sadness and grief and long dying; your harp used to be sweet to me, it wakened my heart to gladness. Now my courage is fallen down, I not to hear you but to be always remembering your ways. Och! my grief is going through me.

A thousand curses on the day when Grania gave you her love, that put Finn of the princes from his wits; it is a sorrowful story your death is to-day.

You were the man was best of the Fenians, beautiful Diarmuid, that women loved. It is dark your dwelling-place is under the sod, it is mournful and cold your bed is; it is pleasant your laugh was to-day; you were my happiness, Diarmuid.

The Parting of Goll and His Wife

AND when Goll knew Finn to be watching for his life he made no attempt to escape but stopped where he was, without food, without drink, and he blinded with the sand that was blowing into his eyes.

And his wife came to a rock where she could speak with him, and she called to him to come to her. "Come over to me," she said; "and it is a pity you to be blinded where you are, on the rocks of the waste sea, with no drink but the salt water, a man that was first in every fight. And come now to be sleeping beside me," she said; "and in place of the hard sea-water I will nourish you from my own breast, and it is I will do your healing," she said; "for it is seven years since you wedded with me, and from that night

to this night I never got a hard word from you. And the gold of your hair is my desire for ever," she said, "and do not stop withering there like an herb in the winter-time, and my heart black with grief within me."

But Goll would not leave the spot where he was for all she could say. "It is best as it is," he said, "and I never took the advice of a woman east or west, and I never will take it. And O sweet-voiced queen," he said, "what ails you to be fretting after me; and remember now your silver and your gold, and your silks and stuffs, and remember the seven hounds I gave you at Cruadh Ceirrge, and every one of them without slackness till he has killed the deer. And do not be crying tears after me, queen with the white hands," he said; "but remember your constant lover, Aodh, the son of the best woman of the world, that came out from Spain asking for you, and that I fought at Corcar-an-Deirg. And go to him now," he said, "for it is bad when a woman is in want of a good man."

And he lay down on the rocks, and at the end of twelve days he died. And his wife keened him there, and made a great lamentation for her husband that had such a great name, and that was the second best of the Fenians of Ireland.

The Death of Osgar

AND after a while, at noonday, they saw Finn coming towards them, and what was left of the Sun-banner raised on a spear-shaft. All of them saluted Finn then, but he made no answer, and he came up to the hill where Osgar was. And when Osgar saw him coming he saluted him, and he said, "I have got my desire in death, Finn of the sharp arms." And Finn said, "It is worse the way you were, my son, on the day of the battle at Ben Edair, when the wild geese could swim on your breast, and it was my hand that gave you healing." "There can no healing be done for me now for ever," said Osgar, "since the King of Ireland put the spear of seven spells through my body."

And Finn said, "it is a pity it was not I myself fell in sunny scarce Gabhra, and you going east and west at the head of the Fenians." "And if it was yourself fell in the battle," said Osgar, "you would not hear me keening after you; for no man ever knew any heart in me," he said, "but a heart of twisted horn, and it covered with iron. But the howling of the dogs beside me," he said, "and the keening of the old fighting men and the crying of the women one after another, those are the things that are vexing me." And Finn said: "child of my child, calf of my calf, white and slender, it is a pity the way you are. And my heart is starting like a deer," he said, "and I am weak after you and after the Fenians of Ireland. And misfortune has followed us," he said, "and farewell now to battles and to a great name, and farewell to taking tributes; for every good thing I ever had is gone from me now," he said. And when Osgar heard those words he stretched out his hands, and his eyelids closed. And Finn turned

away from the rest, and he cried tears down; and he never shed a tear through the whole length of his lifetime but only for Osgar and for Bran.

Oisin's Vision

I SAW the household of Finn; it was not the household of a soft race; I had a vision of that man yesterday.

I saw the household of the High King, he with the brown sweet-voiced son; I never saw a better man.

I saw the household of Finn; no one saw it as I saw it; I saw Finn with the sword, Mac an Luin. Och! it was sorrowful to see it.

I cannot tell out every harm that is on my head; free us from our trouble for ever; I have seen the household of Finn.

7

His Praise of Finn

IT is a week from yesterday I last saw Finn; I never saw a braver man. A king of heavy blows; my law, my adviser, my sense and my wisdom, prince and poet, braver than kings, King of the Fenians, brave in all countries; golden salmon of the sea, clean hawk of the air, rightly taught, avoiding lies; strong in his doings, a right judge, ready in courage, a high messenger in bravery and in music.

His skin lime-white, his hair golden; ready to work, gentle to women; his great green vessels full of rough sharp wine. It is rich the king was, the head of his people.

Seven sides Finn's house had, and seven score shields on every side. Fifty fighting men he had about him having woollen cloaks; ten bright

drinking-cups in his hall, ten blue vessels, ten golden horns.

It is a good household Finn had, without grudging, without lust, without vain boasting, without chattering, without any slur on any one of the Fenians. Finn never refused any man: he never put away any one that came to his house. If the brown leaves falling in the woods were gold, if the white waves were silver, Finn would have given away the whole of it.

Oisin after the Fenians

NOW my strength is gone from me, I that was adviser to the Fenians, my whole body is tired to-night, my hands, my feet, and my head; tired, tired, tired.

It is bad the way I am after Finn of the Fenians; since he is gone away, every good is behind me.

Without great people, without mannerly ways; it is sorrowful I am after our king that is gone.

I am a shaking tree, my leaves gone from me; an empty nut, a horse without a bridle; a people without a dwelling-place, I Oisin, son of Finn.

It is long the clouds are over me to-night! it is

long last night was; although this day is long, yesterday was longer again to me; every day that comes is long to me.

That is not the way I used to be, without fighting, without battles, without learning feats, without young girls, without music, without harps, without bruising bones, without great deeds; without increase of learning, without generosity, without drinking at feasts, without courting, without hunting, the two trades I was used to; without going out to battle. Ochone! the want of them is sorrowful to me.

No hunting of deer or stag, it is not like that I would wish to be; no leashes for our hounds, no hounds; it is long the clouds are over me to-night!

Without rising up to do bravery as we were used, without playing as we had a mind; without swimming of our fighting men in the lake; it is long the clouds are over me to-night!

There is no one at all in the world the way I am; it is a pity the way I am; an old man

dragging stones. It is long the clouds are over me to-night!

I am the last of the Fenians, great Oisin, son of Finn, listening to the voice of bells; it is long the clouds are over me to-night!

The Foretelling of Cathbad the Druid at Deirdre's Birth

LET Deirdre be her name: harm will come through her. She will be fair, comely, bright-haired: heroes will fight for her, and kings go seeking for her.

O Deirdre, on whose account many shall weep, on whose account many women shall be envious, there will be trouble on Ulster for your sake, O fair daughter of Fedlimid.

Many will be jealous of your face, O flame of beauty; for your sake heroes shall go to exile. For your sake deeds of anger shall be done in Emain; there is harm in your face, for it will bring banishment and death on the sons of kings.

In your fate, O beautiful child, are wounds and ill-doings and shedding of blood.

You will have a little grave apart to yourself; you will be a tale of wonder for ever, Deirdre.

Deirdre's Lament for the Sons of Usnach

AS for Deirdre, she cried pitifully, wearily, and tore her fair hair, and she was talking of the sons of Usnach, and of Alban, and it is what she said:

A blessing eastward to Alban from me; good is the sight of her bays and valleys, pleasant was it to sit on the slopes of her hills, where the sons of Usnach used to be hunting.

One day, when the nobles of Alban were drinking with the sons of Usnach, Naoise gave a kiss secretly to the daughter of the lord of Duntreon. He sent her a frightened deer, wild, and a fawn at its foot; and he went to visit her coming home from the troops of Inverness.

When myself heard that, my head filled full of jealousy; I put my boat on the waves, it was the same to me to live or to die. They followed me swimming, Ainnle and Ardan, that never said a lie; they turned me back again, two that would give battle to a hundred. Naoise gave me his true word, he swore three times with his arms as witness, he would never put vexation on me again, until he would go from me to the armies of the dead.

Och! if she knew to-night, Naoise to be under a covering of clay, it is she would cry her fill, and it is I would cry along with her!

After that Deirdre lay down by the grave, and they were digging earth from it, and she made this lament after the sons of Usnach:

Long is the day without the sons of Usnach; it was never wearisome to be in their company; sons of a king that entertained exiles; three lions of the Hill of the Cave.

Three darlings of the women of Britain; three hawks of Slieve Cuilenn; sons of a king

served by valour, to whom warriors did obedience.

Three heroes not good at homage; their fall is a cause of sorrow; three sons of the sister of a king; three props of the army of Cuailgne.

The High King of Ulster, my first betrothed, I forsook for love of Naoise; short my life will be after him; I will make keening at their burial.

That I would live after Naoise let no one think on the earth; I will not go on living after Ainnle and after Ardan.

After them I myself will not live; three that would leap through the midst of battle; since my beloved is gone from me I will cry my fill over his grave.

O, young man, digging the new grave, do not make the grave narrow; I will be along with them in the grave, making lamentations and ochones!

Many the hardship I met with along with the three heroes; I suffered want of home, want of fire, it is myself that used not to be troubled.

Their three shields and their spears made a bed for me often. O, young man, put their three swords close over their grave!

Their three hounds, their three hawks, will be from this time without huntsmen; three aids of every battle; three pupils of Conall Cearnach.

The three leashes of those three hounds have brought a sigh from my heart; it is I had the care of them, the sight of them is a cause of grief.

I was never one day alone to the day of the making of this grave, though it is often that myself and yourselves were in loneliness.

My sight is gone from me with looking at the grave of Naoise; it is short till my life will leave me, and those who would have keened me do not live.

Since it is through me they were betrayed I will be tired out with sorrow; it is a pity I was not in the earth before the sons of Usnach were killed.

Sorrowful was my journey with Fergus, betraying me to the Red Branch; we were deceived

all together with his sweet, flowery words. I left the delights of Ulster for the three heroes that were bravest; my life will not be long, I myself am alone after them.

I am Deirdre without gladness, and I at the end of my life; since it is grief to be without them, I myself will not be long after them!

Emer's Lament for Cuchulain

AND Emer took the head of Cuchulain in her hands, and she washed it clean, and put a silk cloth about it, and she held it to her breast, and she began to cry heavily over it, and she made this complaint:

Och, head! Ochone, O head! you gave death to great heroes, to many hundreds; my head will lie in the same grave, the one stone will be made for both of us.

Och, hand! Ochone, hand, that was once gentle. It is often it was put under my head; it is dear that hand was to me.

Dear mouth! Ochone, kind mouth that was sweet-voiced telling stories; since the time love first came on your face, you never refused either weak or strong.

Dear the man, dear the man, that would kill the whole of a great army; dear his cold bright hair, and dear his bright cheeks!

Dear the king, dear the king, that never gave a refusal to any; thirty days it is to-night since my body lay beside your body.

Och, two spears! Ochone, two spears! Och, shield! Och, deadly sword! Let them be given, to Conall of the battles; there was never any wage given the like of that.

I am glad, I am glad, Cuchulain of Muirthemne, I never brought red shame on your face, for any unfaithfulness against you.

Happy are they, happy are they, who will never hear the cuckoo again for ever, now that the Hound has died from us.

I am carried away like a branch on the stream; I will not bind up my hair to-day. From this day I have nothing to say that is better than Ochone! "And oh! my love," she said, "we were often in one another's company, and it was happy for us; for if the world had been searched

from the rising of the sun to sunset, the like would never have been found in one place, of the Black Sainglain and the Grey of Macha, and Laeg the chariot-driver, and myself and Cuchulain. And it is breaking my heart is in my body, to be listening to the pity and the sorrowing of women and men, and the harsh crying of the young men of Ulster keening Cuchulain." And after that Emer bade Conall to make a wide, very deep grave for Cuchulain; and she laid herself down beside her gentle comrade, and she put her mouth to his mouth, and she said: "Love of my life, my friend, my sweetheart, my one choice of the men of the earth, many is the woman, wed or unwed, envied me till to-day; and now I will not stay living after you."

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